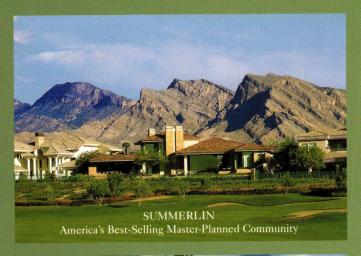
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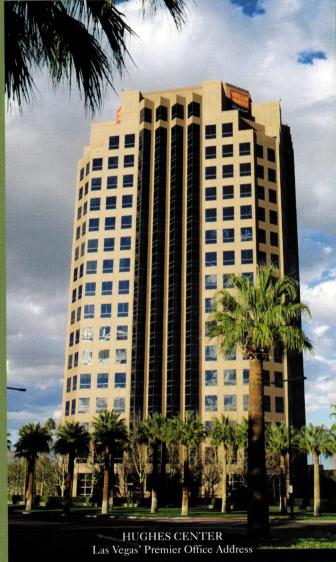


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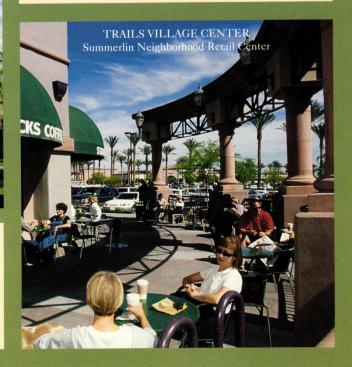
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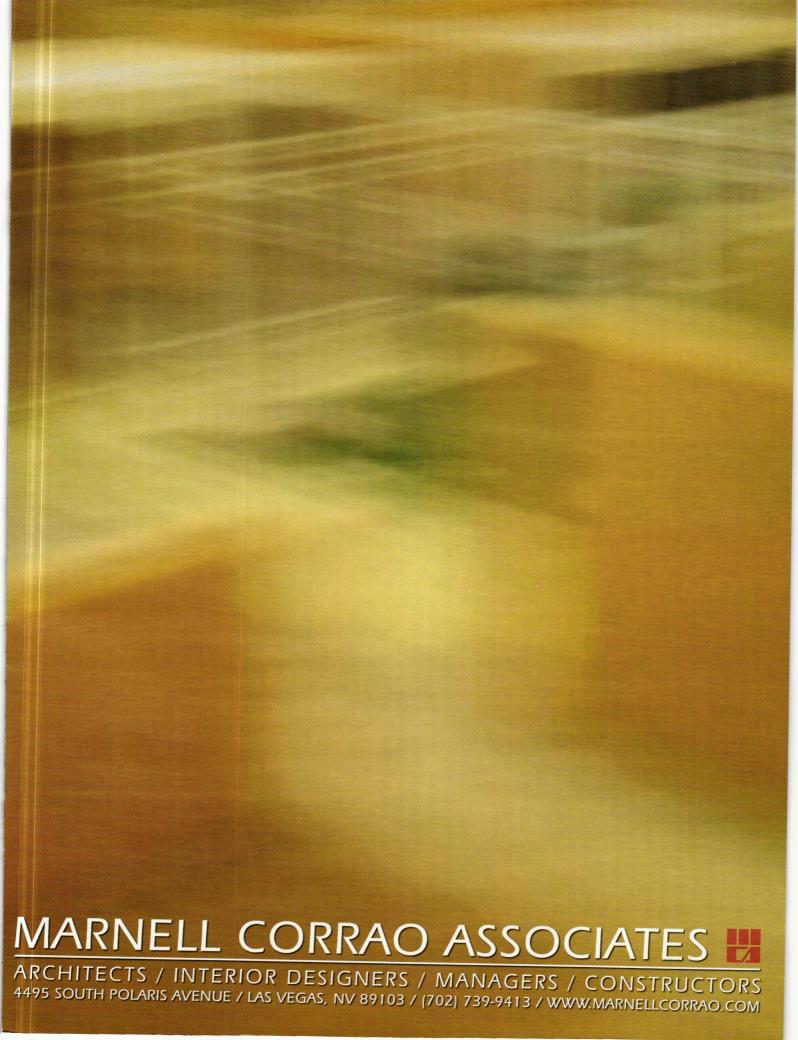
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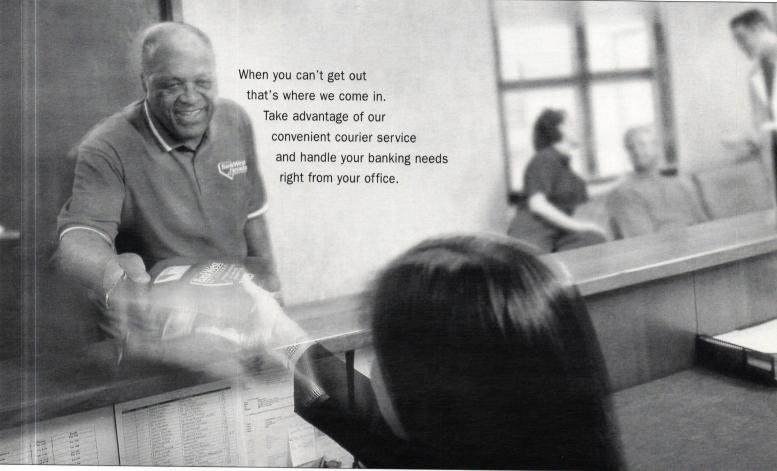




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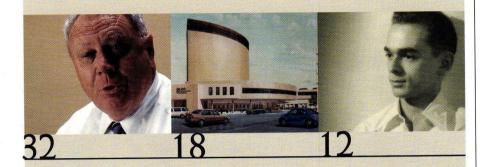






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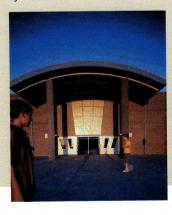
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The American Institute of Architects is a national professional organization of designers, architects and builders of livable communities. The Las Vegas Chapter of the AIA was founded in January of 1956, and has served the profession and the Las Vegas community for 45 years.

Architecture

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president's NOTE

MANY DEMOGRAPHERS HAVE LIKENED LAS VEGAS OF THE NEW century to Detroit of the old century. They contrast the recent abundance of employment opportunities and the new economic engine of entertainment and gaming in Las Vegas to the older economic mechanism created by the booming industrial production in 1950s Detroit. But Las Vegas is a new kind of city—the only one founded after 1900 that exceeded a population of one million before the expiration of the 20th century, and is projected to reach two million residents by 2010. With its unprecedented growth and a sturdy economy, Las Vegas has invented and reinvented itself, becoming the new paradigm of the American City.

At the same time, those of us who live in this country's fastest growing metropolis realize that we have the same needs and desires as the residents of other American cities. The challenge for architects, designers, planners and involved citizens alike is to produce public architecture that distinguishes our city, identifies our place and engages our citizens while providing the schools, municipalities and public services essential to our communities. The unusual architecture of our city, with the hospitality and entertainment venues we have created, not only captures the imagination and disposable income of tourists and residents alike, but has helped to develop fresh concepts for our public spaces and is also helping to re-

define the role that public architecture can play in our communities.

While it is difficult to follow the inaugural issue of any publication, this second issue of *Architecture Las Vegas* provides an excellent opportunity for us to continue the dialogue we began with the first. This issue raises questions concerning the nature and the role of public architecture in this exceptional place. How does public architecture serve the citizens of Las Vegas? What are architects doing to further the quality of our public places? Are we thinking about the public's broad range of needs in creating architecture that strives to enlighten the soul and refresh the spirit? How can these instances of public architecture inform and instruct us further with regard to the critical elements in the fabric of our city?

My hope is that the articles and accounts within this volume of *Architecture Las Vegas* will inspire you to take an active interest in the public spaces in our community and voice your concerns and ideas when the opportunities arise. Together may we revel in our successes; be critical and introspective of our failures; address challenges with honesty and forthrightness; and learn about the values that shape our built environment.

- David Frommer, president of AIA Las Vegas

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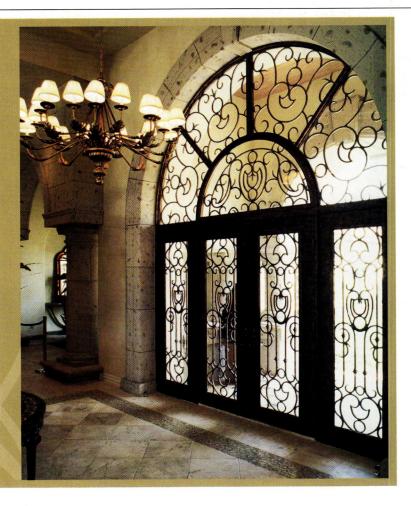
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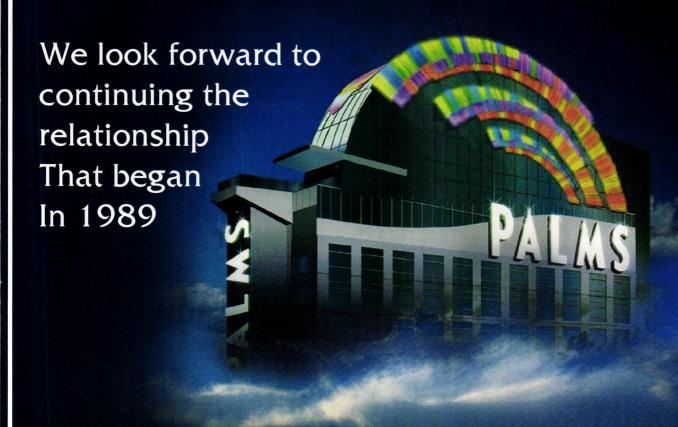
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MORE ORDER FOR LAW

Regional Justice Center is the biggest among new public projects

FOLLOWING THE LEAD OF THE new Lloyd D. George Federal Courthouse, several noteworthy public projects are under way in the Valley. Perhaps foremost is the \$125 million Regional Justice Center designed by Windom Kimsey of Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects and being built by AF Construction. To be completed in June, the 18story, 770,000-square-foot structure will feature a centered, lengthof-the-building open atrium with glass on the top and sides. A "canyon wall" of red sandstone with balconies will extend the full height and length of the atrium. On the upper levels, four courtrooms are stacked per floor, ascending from the city through the Nevada Supreme Court. The traditional sense of courthouse will be maintained by the broad steps, "modern interpretation" columns and a plaza, which will lead into the new Lewis Avenue Corridor.

SWA Group is designing this \$2.5 million streetscape running along Lewis between Casino Center and Las Vegas boulevards. Limited vehicular traffic will be allowed west of Fourth Street, while the pedestrian plaza to the east will be marked by a "big water feature," ash trees for shade and bench seating. The project is going to bid this fall.

The City of Las Vegas also has scheduled a complete renovation and expansion of the old **Doolittle Center** on the westside. Welles



THE NEW JUSTICE CENTER WILL FEATURE A "CANYON" ATRIUM.

Pugsley Architects is working with a \$7.5 million budget to add a gymnasium, game room and classrooms, redesign the pool area, and remodel the exterior. Plans are to share the new gym and parking facilities with the adjacent Agassi Charter School. The city expects to take bids before year's end.

Henderson has a two-pronged recreational project headed for Green Valley Ranch. Stantec Consulting Inc. has designed the **Promenade and Special Events Plaza**, featuring the largest outdoor amphitheater in Nevada. The \$9 million venue, at Green Valley and Paseo Verde parkways, will offer covered seating for 2,500 and turf accommodating another 5,000. The 85,000-square-foot, \$11.5 million **Multigenerational Center**, designed by Dekker Perich Holmes

Sabatini Architects, will interlace indoor and outdoor activities for young and old. It will be completed next fall, climbing wall and all.

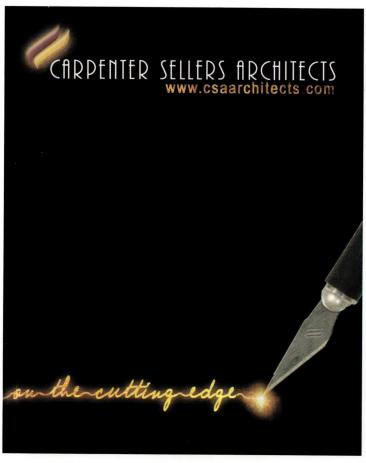
The Las Vegas Springs Preserve project, a unique mix of history, preservation, conservation, indoor-outdoor amalgam, publicprivate funding and multi-designfirm cooperation, will experience a \$171 million transformation by the city's 100th anniversary in 2005. Two major structures are being developed on the 180-acre site. The Interpretive Visitors Center, a \$35 million project being drawn by Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects, will probably be cast-in-place concrete with extensive use of natural stones. Poured-earth and rammed-earth techniques may also be used. The multileveled center will be topped by a "desert green" roof with plantings

rolling up from the surrounding landscape. Lucchesi Galati Architects describe their \$20 million Desert Living Center as an exhibit in itself, exemplifying "desert-appropriate water- and energy-conserving design solutions." Though the first level of the 45,000-square-foot, two-story building will be below ground on three sides, there is an emphasis on indoor/outdoor spaces, many interplaying with the five acres of desert living gardens.

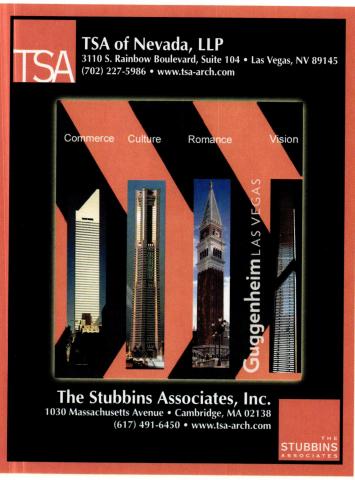
The proposed Clark County
Nature Preserve and Visitor and
Education Center are being
redesigned due to relocation from
desert to wetlands environment. The
first edition of the center was awardwinning, and Dekker Perich Holmes
Sabatini is looking to duplicate this
with the \$12 million, 35,000square-foot building.

UNLV's Lied Library is finally operative, and attention has turned to its two-building predecessor. Welles Pugsley Architects is authoring a \$15 million makeover of the 170,000 square feet that will house the William S. Boyd School of Law. Martin-Harris Construction expects to complete the renovation by next summer. Of note: A large skylight will be cut into the top of the round building, reflecting the new interest in natural lighting and openness.

Also on campus, KGA will be directing traffic for a particularly









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ticklish \$12.6 million remodel and expansion of **Wright Hall**. Two-thirds of the campus mall building will be demolished and 60,000 square feet of new construction added. Space, landscaping and exterior finish constraints have led to a three-story EIFS, block and sandstone structure with brushed stainless steel canopy elements. At the center of the new social sciences classroom and office complex will be a rotunda enveloped by sandstone and extending into the desert demonstration garden.

The smallest and perhaps most unusual campus project, the Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Development Center, was awarded to ericSTRAIN Architect. The 20,000-square-foot, \$3.5 million "village" within the campus set to receive construction bids. Each of

the six buildings, while varying in size and design, has a stucco block and galvanized aluminum exterior with one wall of glass facing the common courtyard. Glazed "garage doors" open outward to link with the desert landscape and to provide shade beneath.

The \$1 billion Fashion Show Mall project features a redesign and addition by Altoon + Porter Architects of Los Angeles. Whiting Turner Contracting is renovating the existing 1.1 million square feet and adding 800,000 more, highlighted by a high-tech fashion center and a hydraulically controlled stage/runway for the Great Hall event venue. The effort to increase Strip presence will produce "a new Las Vegas icon"—the 600-foot metal cloud jutting over Las Vegas Boulevard and featuring nighttime videos on its

underbelly. Most work is expected to be completed by November 2002.

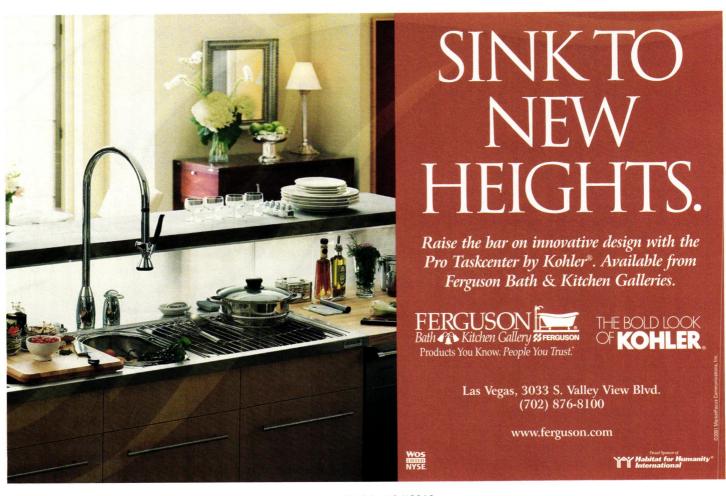
There are two notable additions to off-Strip properties. The first to open, on November 15, will be the Palms, a \$265 million boutique resort owned by the Maloof family. KGA is the executive architect, and the Jerde Partnership International is the project's master planner and design architect for the exterior and interior of the main casino, noteworthy for its sensual curved shape. Also of note: Ghostbar on the 55th floor, with its ceilings illuminated in shrouds of grays and greens, floorto-ceiling windows and the Ghost Deck overlooking the city.

The only similarity between the \$268 million Palms and the \$300 million Green Valley Ranch Station Casino is that Perini Building Company is constructing



THE LATEST STATION CASINO RESEMBLES AN ARGENTINEAN RANCH.

both. Green Valley Ranch Station Casino, true to its name, resembles a large Argentinean estaszia (ranch). The 330,000-square-foot resort, near Green Valley Parkway and the 215 beltway, will offer a host of dining and entertainment amenities, including an outdoor amphitheater. Designed by Scott Avjian Design Inc. and the Friedmutter Group, the interior is awash in earth tones accentuated by Old World wood and leather furniture and custom tile. Its opening is set for December.



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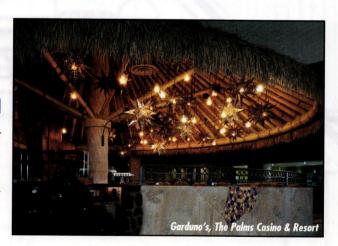
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THE ARCHITECT'S ARCHITECT

Homer Rissman built his career on a foundation of kindness

BY GREG BLAKE MILLER

Las Vegas lost two of its towering architectural pioneers this year. Martin Stern Jr., creator of the Y-design for hotel-casinos, died in July at age 84 and was celebrated as one of the men responsible for the majesty of today's Strip. His great contemporary, 74-year-old Homer Rissman, died of lung cancer in October, shortly after the Nevada Chapter of the American Institute of Architects had awarded him its highest honor, the Silver Medal. The following is a look at Rissman's career.

IN THE LATE 1960S, WITH LAS VEGAS IN ONE OF ITS PERIODIC

fits of reinvention, a young architect named Joel Bergman went to work

for the master reinventer, Martin Stern Jr. Structure by structure, Stern was making the horizontal Strip vertical. His latest project was to build an addition to Homer Rissman's Bonanza Hotel.

Bergman's task: Get a glimpse of Rissman's drawings.

But Rissman, like Stern, was one of the premier builders in a rough-and-tumble market. There was little reason to think he would aid and abet his competitor's reworking of the Bonanza. Bergman called anyway. Rissman greeted him in a gentle voice. Bergman said his piece and waited for the brush-off. It never came.

"Rather than shine me on, he helped me in every way possible," Bergman recalls. "He gave me drawings and guidance and encouragement. From that moment on, I fell in love with Homer Rissman. He was a consummate gentleman. A rarity among architects."

For more than 50 years, Rissman thrived in a field full of sharp elbows and hard heads without losing his gift for collegial generosity. His career was not only about creating buildings, but about building a community of respect among the creators: Architects learn from architects, and, in the end, the city is their joint venture. Rissman's elegant designs helped define the modern Strip, but the Silver Medal he received this year from the Nevada Chapter of the American Institute of Architects was a tribute to him not only as an artist, but as a friend.



RISSMAN'S REGENCY TOWERS BROUGHT VISUAL SOPHIS-TICATION TO VEGAS. BELOW: RISSMAN'S 1954 HAND DRAWING OF THE NEVADA HOTEL, WHICH WAS NOT BUILT.

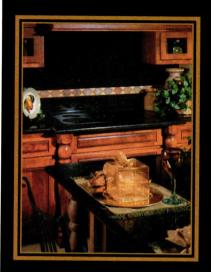
RISSMAN STARTED HIS PRACTICE IN CHICAGO IN 1949 and moved it to Los Angeles in 1954. The next year he

began building in Las Vegas. In 1960, Rissman's brother, Marshall, joined him, forming Rissman and Rissman Associates. (Marshall died in 1981.) From the 1950s to the 1980s, as Stern trailblazed his way down the Strip creating new Vegas icons at the Sahara, the Sands and the old MGM (now Bally's), Rissman was transforming the boulevard with his designs at the Hacienda, Circus Circus and the Flamingo.

Each man received commissions to update the work of the other. Among Rissman's most renowned jobs was his expansion of the Hilton, where Stern had built the city's first Y-shaped tower in 1969. Previously, hotels had grown by building additional structures; the Y-design allowed for efficient expansion and operation of a single tower, with less duplication of facilities. Rissman quickly internalized an understanding of the new approach and how to make use of its advantages. He built a long tail



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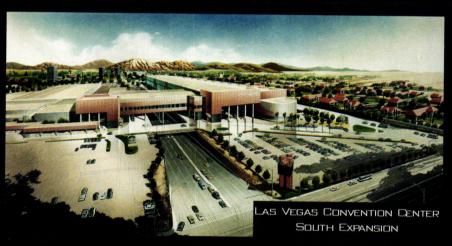
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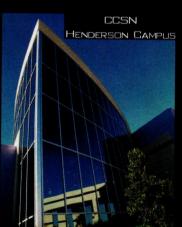
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on the Hilton "Y" and extended one of its arms, seamlessly integrating new rooms, service areas and convention facilities into the existing tower while nearly doubling the size of the hotel. "He knew everything," says Henri Lewin, who was president at the Hilton when Rissman did his additions in the 1970s. "He could be building a new wing five feet away and there would be no noise factor. Nothing was ever closed during the expansion." The Hilton had provided the laboratory for two giants of Las Vegas architecture to create and develop a new kind of hotel tower that would ultimately dominate the Strip. "Homer capitalized on what Martin Stern had in mind," Lewin says.

IN THE LAS VEGAS ARCHITECTURAL WORLD, YOU QUICKLY learn your passions are layered like sedimentary stone upon those of another artist, and that he may someday put another layer atop yours. Building great Vegas towers necessarily involves some ego, but it keeps you humble, too. After all, you never know when a casino mogul is going to tear your work down. It happened to Homer Rissman repeatedly. The Hacienda is gone. So are the Silver Slipper and the old Castaways and the Bonanza.

"When you come to our age, it's very difficult to deal with implosions," says Robert Fielden, 62, a prominent Las Vegas architect and longtime friend of Rissman's. "There is so much emotion and energy that goes into developing a major project. Those hotels were like children to Homer. One of the basic tenets of our training is that we're to design build-

ings that contribute to the quality of our lives and will be used for generations and generations to come. Then they're replaced by something else not as good as what you'd originally developed."

Fortunately, the demolished and transformed among Rissman's works survive on paper. Rissman was legendary among local architects for his skill at the lost art of hand drafting. Long after others had turned to Computer Aided Design (CAD) for their drafting needs, Rissman continued to turn out elegantly precise drawings on Mylar and tracing paper. "Homer's heritage is captured and encapsulated in his drawings," Fielden says. "They're just magnificent architectural drawings. Homer is a giant in that area, maintaining that old-school approach."

Rissman's drawings show each stage of his projects, offering a glimpse into an architectural process that is becoming rare as architects revise CAD plans without retaining earlier versions of their work. "We're losing that history of process," Fielden says. "That's one thing Homer gave to us because a large amount of his work is preserved, the process of thought and development. This will make for extraordinary case studies for teaching architecture." Rissman's drawings are now housed at the UNLV Lied Library's Special Collections. Along with Stern's drafts, which have been at UNLV since 1996, they offer an irreplaceable record of the second generation of Strip architecture. Architects who found immortality hard to come by in steel and brick may, ironically, find it in pen and ink.

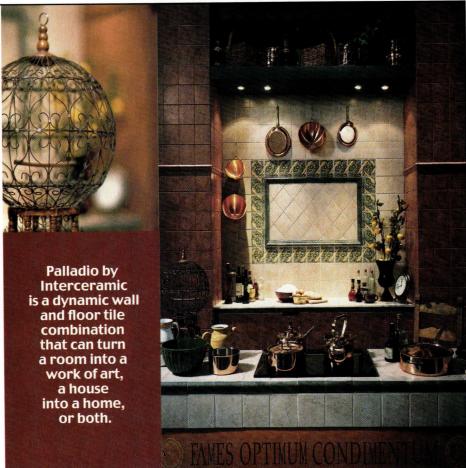




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LAS VEGAS WAS NOT JUST A CANVAS FOR RISSMAN'S VISIONS; it was also his home, and he sought to make it a better place. In addition to commissioned community projects such as the Spring Valley Library, Rissman did years of pro-bono work that helped shape Spring Mountain Ranch State Park and its popular amphitheater. He also lectured on architecture at UNLV. "He was a wonderful influence on young architects," Bergman says. "And he was an active architect. He didn't just sit in the office and let others do the work."

Rissman worked in a wide variety of styles, from the exquisite theming of the riverboat-style Holiday Casino to the streamlined simplicity of

Regency Towers. Above all, he created buildings that worked—not only as showpieces, but as living structures. He was a master of the nitty-gritty, the fundamentals of the art. "He brought a level of elegance to the environments of those buildings and an element of tailoring and craftsmanship that had never existed here before," Fielden says. "He was the first to bring order out of chaos."

"He knew his business A to Z," says Lewin. "He was available 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. If Homer said it would cost \$12 million, it came in at \$11 million. He could be in a meeting for hours and hours and he was never wrong. He was a motivator and a professional. We believed in him in a tremendous way. We always went with Homer Rissman because he was the best. No baloney."

And Rissman went about being the best with a benevolence his colleagues won't soon forget. "I think it was God's blessing to Homer that over all these years he was able to remain a gentleman in all aspects of his life," Fielden says.

"Most of all, he was just a really nifty guy," Bergman says. "This guy was as charming as anyone who ever lived."

In a land of impermanent castles, Rissman's legacy seems secure. He found his way not only to the heart of a young city's architecture, but into the hearts of its architects.

Greg Blake Miller is a writer with Greenspun Media Group.

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OUR CROSSROADS

Las Vegas must build on the qualities that once made the city a prodigy

BY ALAN HESS

ELEVATION BRINGS ENLIGHTENMENT. WHY ELSE WOULD high-priced lawyers rent high-rise suites? So in search of illumination, I drive to the top floor of the Aladdin's new parking garage, topping out at 11 stories, to contemplate America's greatest metropolitan enigma, Las Vegas.

The view is breathtaking. With the silvery blue mansards of Bally's almost at eye level, I stare out to the east. A checkerboard of nubby green trees and smooth green golf courses mix with patches of gray asphalt parking lots and gray-roofed shopping centers. Outcropping pinnacles of high-rise hotels, offices and condos dot the landscape.

To the west, Aladdin's dun-colored towers are the closest peaks in an odd mountain range that splits the Las Vegas Valley in half, an artificial sierra of literary images from histories, legends and fairy tales: the turrets of *Le Mort d'Arthur*, the Manhattan skyline from the tales of Eloise at the Plaza Hotel, the Eiffel tower from Ludwig Bemelman's Madeleine stories. They stand out garishly and mysteriously against the rim of ragged desert mountains in the distance.

The vista is uncanny and compelling. As I stand on the vacant deck, I

successful experiments in reinventing the American urban experience.

Take the botched sidewalk in front of the new Aladdin. In front of Treasure Island, Bellagio and Paris, designers created urban, commercial, communal experiences to equal New York's Fifth Avenue, Chicago's Miracle Mile and San Francisco's Union Square. But the Aladdin sidewalk is confusing and bland, its segues to the interior blank and unappealing, its magical cliff indecipherable and intimidating, its theming unconvincing.

Or take the way the city voraciously consumes itself, leveling its workable historical spaces for uncomfortable new spaces—as in the Sahara's remodeled pool terrace.

Or take the slow evolution of mass transit despite the success of shortrun monorail lines.

Or take the decline of the art of signage. Artists like Hermon Boernge, Kermit Wayne and Lee Klay raised signage (not limited to neon) to a zenith in the 1960s, a parallel to the high-art Pop Art of Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Claes Oldenburg. Yet current sign technology (the TV screens in the sky, for example) are integrated into the architec-

ture so clumsily that one would never imagine that the previous tradition ever existed.

Las Vegas is at a crossroads. Every city becomes self-aware at some point. It matures, defines itself and begins to institute formal and informal controls to maintain its character. In its youth, Las Vegas was a child prodigy, its lais-sez-faire genius generating a new American urbanism of the suburban commercial strip, pioneering

an architecture of entertainment that defined the late 20th century.

Now that urban wunderkind has to move on. Las Vegas can build on its youthful qualities of invention and self-confidence. Or it can sheepishly renounce its past and look to other cities to guide it.

Alan Hess, architecture critic for the San Jose Mercury News, is author of the architectural histories Palm Springs Weekend and Viva Las Vegas, both published by Chronicle Books.



am aware that I am staring into the heart of the American City in the 21st century. And I am humbled by the awareness that I can't figure it all out. Reading this city is like reading U/ysses, in which I recognize Joyce's words as English, but I see that they have been linked in a new syntax.

The roof of the Aladdin garage gives us a platform from which to glimpse the creation of a new kind of city. But how many architects, developers and planners have been up here to ponder the view? For all their successes, Las Vegas builders sometimes overlook some of the city's most



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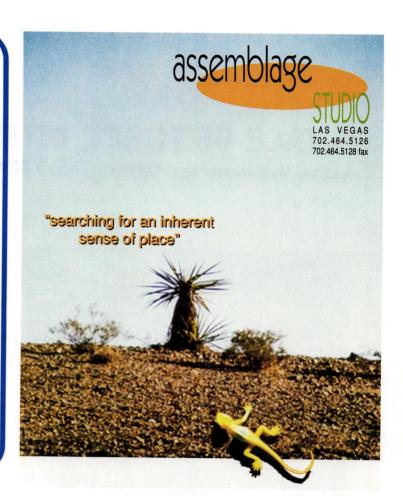
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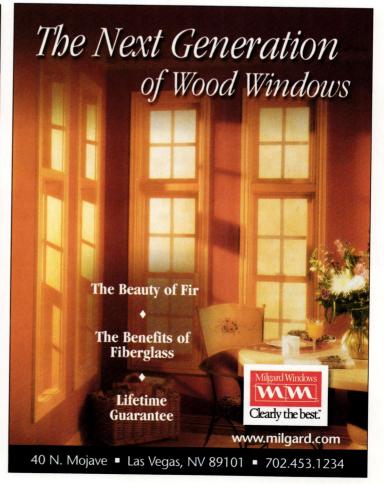
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A TALE OF THREE CITIES

Vegas, Henderson and Mesquite make different statements with new city halls

BY DAVID HAY







I RECENTLY RETURNED TO LAS VEGAS AFTER 25 YEARS AND WAS surprised that the building that most aroused my interest was City Hall. But I soon discovered that few shared my admiration for this unusual building. Designed by A.J. Lumsden, a respected architect in the Los Angeles firm DMJM, it was now viewed as an object to be shunned, almost embarrassed by.

This fall from grace—amplified by City Hall's inability to serve a populace that has grown fivefold—has prompted a \$15.2 million remodel. But it's not the only city hall undergoing a transformation. In Henderson, a \$65 million expansion (shown above, center) will be completed in 2003, and 70 miles away, Mesquite opened its new city hall last June (shown bottom).

Traditionally, city halls have been asked to make a strong emblematic statement about their hosts. But the reconfigured Las Vegas City Hall, so intent on increasing ease of access, passes up any idea of acting as potent symbol for the fastest-growing city in America.

Completed in 1973, the original building exhibits many imaginative design elements, most notably an 11-story, curving, travertine marble facade. With a reflecting pool at its base, it was designed to shield more than just the harsh southern sun. "We were instructed that the public officials in the building needed to be protected," Lumsden told me later. (His instructions came from Washington, D.C., agencies worried about the power of criminal elements in Las Vegas.)

Lumsden was not satisfied with just one design concept. "I've always liked a composition of forms," he told me. The north-facing side of the building proves his point, with its three-story, open circular plaza at the foot of the building and facade, which is distinguished by a column of offices, each with S-curved, floor-to-ceiling windows.

At the time, the structure was imbued with some considerable symbolic power. "We designed it to be a big shape," Lumsden said. "Not the St. Louis arch, but still big." It was an icon that symbolized a city coming into its own. The Society of American Registered Architects agreed, awarding DMJM with its National Gold Medal Award for design excellence in 1974.

But times change, and City Hall shows its age. The lack of parking turns most visits into a chore. Its office capacity is nowhere near sufficient to house all city employees. U.S. 95 now hems in the building, making the open north facade seem almost as inaccessible as the windowless southern facade. Finally, the more outlandish forms going up on the Strip have diminished whatever iconographic power the building may have had.

Nonetheless, I wonder whether the option of tearing it down—briefly considered, according to City Manager Steven Houchens—would not have been better than the current efforts to adapt the building.

Admittedly, the brief given the firm, KGA, and its lead project architect, James Lord, was unusual. City officials wanted additional parking to be combined with office space and a TV studio.

KGA felt little need to pay deference to the original building, especially its facade. According to Lord, many employees, whose opinions were canvassed in a weeklong design conference, felt that "the current City Hall turns its back on Downtown and the citizenry."

The architects' plans lessen the dominance of the facade by building two jagged, amoeba-shaped forms—containing office space—up against its base. The second floor of these new offices is elevated above the sidewalk. (Parts hang out over Stewart Street.) A strip of black, steel-framed



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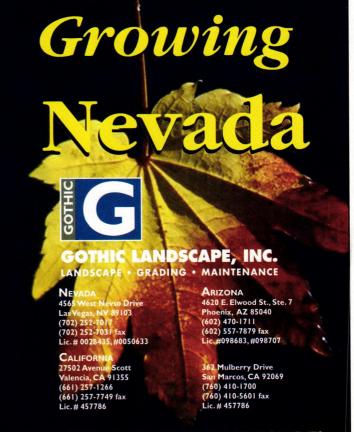
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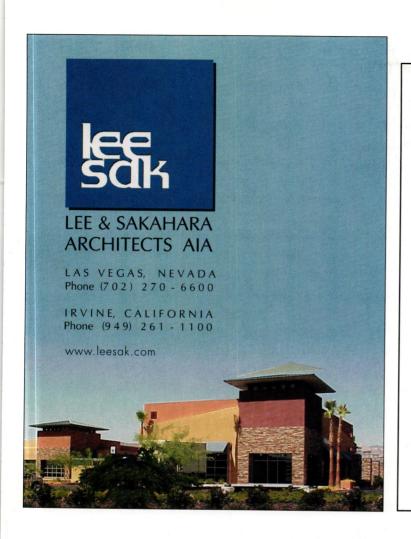
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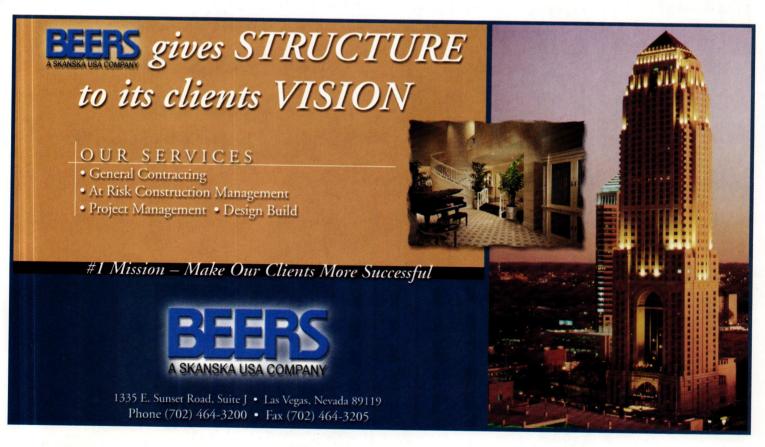


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windows goes around the outside of each of these office additions, which are to be coated with a marble tile matching the original travertine.

A bridge, on a slight diagonal, connects these lower-floor offices—now a heavy, asymmetrical apron on the original tower—to a seven-story parking structure. Although this concrete form has a matching patina and attempts some reference to City Hall—a small curved wall hides the elevator lobbies—it is an unnecessarily dominant mass with no complementary design relationship to the starkly simple form of the original.

The new building, however, fits in well with what Houchens refers to as the evolution from "city hall to city campus." This "campus" will be further expanded by the addition of a 10-story tower to the north.

What concerns me about the design, currently under construction, is that the original building's iconographic power will be totally diluted. In its place will be a group of forms reminiscent of a shopping mall whose sections have been built over different decades. This may be an appropriate symbol for a suburban municipality but not for a city trying to give its downtown core the feel of a dynamic urban center.

In addition, this reconfigured complex, although more accessible by foot and car, is still not visually open and as such doesn't counter the criticism of the current structure that "it turns its back on the city." Furthermore, this campus will have no instantly recognizable form. (The old one at least had that.) A great opportunity to let design make an exciting statement about the future of the city has been passed up.

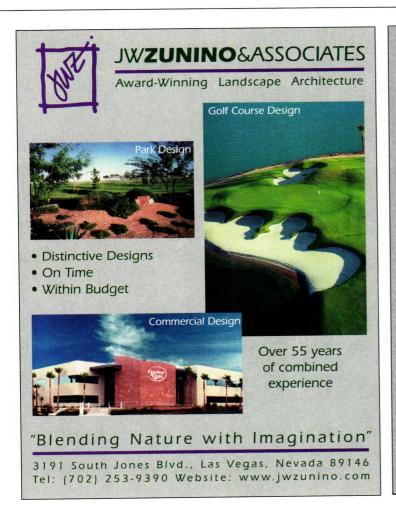
IN TWO YEARS' TIME, when people talk about Henderson, once perceived as the ugly stepsister to the south, they may well conjure up an image of its city hall. Admittedly, the competition for attention high on the southeastern end of Water Street is not as great. Indeed, small cottages still line some adjoining streets. Nonetheless HCA Architects' Mark Hobica's design has an adventurous yet inviting monumentality about it that speaks well of the aspirations of the second-largest city in Nevada.

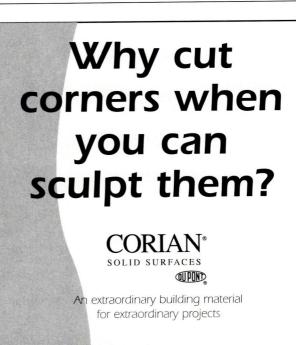
"We wanted to give the city of Henderson a new image, that of a city of strength," Hobica told me.

Interestingly enough, his design involves curving facades. The new addition, which enlarges the size of City Hall from 56,000 to 275,000 square feet, has a four-story, curving, window-clad wall. Opposite and across a plaza that acts like an inviting, landscaped funnel is a new parking garage with its own, highly complementary, curving facade.

The face of the addition attractively sets large areas of dark, green, UV-reducing glass against its pre-cast, concrete exterior. Where it adjoins the western end of the pink stuccoed, existing City Hall, the building is elevated, thus diminishing differences in scale and material by floating above its older counterpart.

This new City Hall will be the biggest building around. With multiple entry points and shaded plazas, it sets out to embrace Henderson's citizens. There are still some unenviable campus-like problems, notably the dominant presence of the starkly utilitarian Emergency Services building, but





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its new structures reflect well on its clients goals: to demonstrate a resurgent municipal strength, and a willingness to share this with the citizenry.

TO FIND CIVIC OFFICIALS who adhere to the laudable, although now uncommon, idea that a city hall ought to set a design example, it's necessary to drive 77 miles to the east. Here in Mesquite last January, they opened the doors to their new city hall, a \$5.8 million, 30,000-square-foot building designed by Eric Migacz of the Salt Lake City firm MHTN. It stands out on Main Street not only because of its lack of commercial signage—this overpowers most of its neighbors—but also because of its crisp, contemporary take on the traditional Southwestern aesthetic.

That the building pays homage to such a style is no accident. In winning the bid, MHTN had to conform to Mesquite's design standards. Adopted in 1995, these promote what City Manager Brian Montgomery describes as "Southwest Mediterranean pueblo." This preference for historicism is not simply a romantic notion. Mesquite wants to transform itself into a western-style resort town, and city officials think it should look the part.

But this was not all Mesquite's city fathers wanted. According to Montgomery, the new building had to symbolize that "our best days are ahead of us." Added the city manager, "I wanted City Hall to be a 'wow."

I found such an exhortation reassuring. Here was a design brief asking for something beyond a simple nuts-and-bolts solution. (Las Vegas'

more mundane request for offices, parking and a TV studio came to mind.)

Migacz's design cleverly subverts some of the backward-looking precepts assumed by Mesquite's design standards: heavy, square, adobe forms with darkened interior light. In front sits a circular, landscaped amphitheater, bordered on the street side by a wooden trellis. The circle is completed on the City Hall side by a curving, window-filled face. Inside, these tall glass panels throw a wonderful diffused light on to the green, polished-concrete floors in the lobby.

Again getting away from rectangular, adobe-style convention, Migacz shifts the front entrance off-center and to the right. Similarly his elegantly shaped clock tower—which hides the elevator shaft—is skewed to the right.

Although the wings off this building core are also placed asymmetrically, their massive forms tend to dwarf the subtle design features of the center section. Since these wings are what are first seen by approaching motorists, the imaginative face of City Hall can be easily missed.

Nonetheless in this town of 16,000, it's admirable that city officials believe they should be leading the way. Perhaps this is a sign of youthfulness, but there's no reason why the citizens of any town shouldn't take pride in the design of their city hall. Look at Las Vegas. Back in 1973, A.J. Lumsden's design gave its citizens an optimistic sense of their city's future.

David Hay is a Los Angeles-based arts and design writer. His articles have appeared in The New York Times, dwell and Architectural Record.

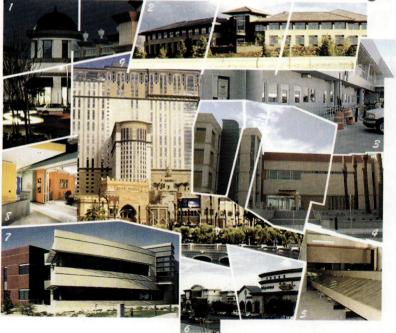
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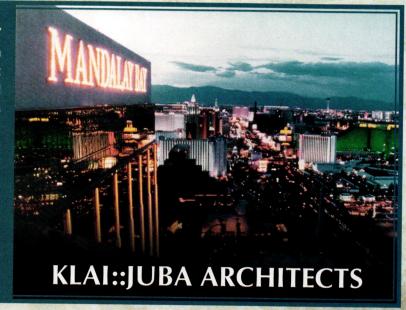


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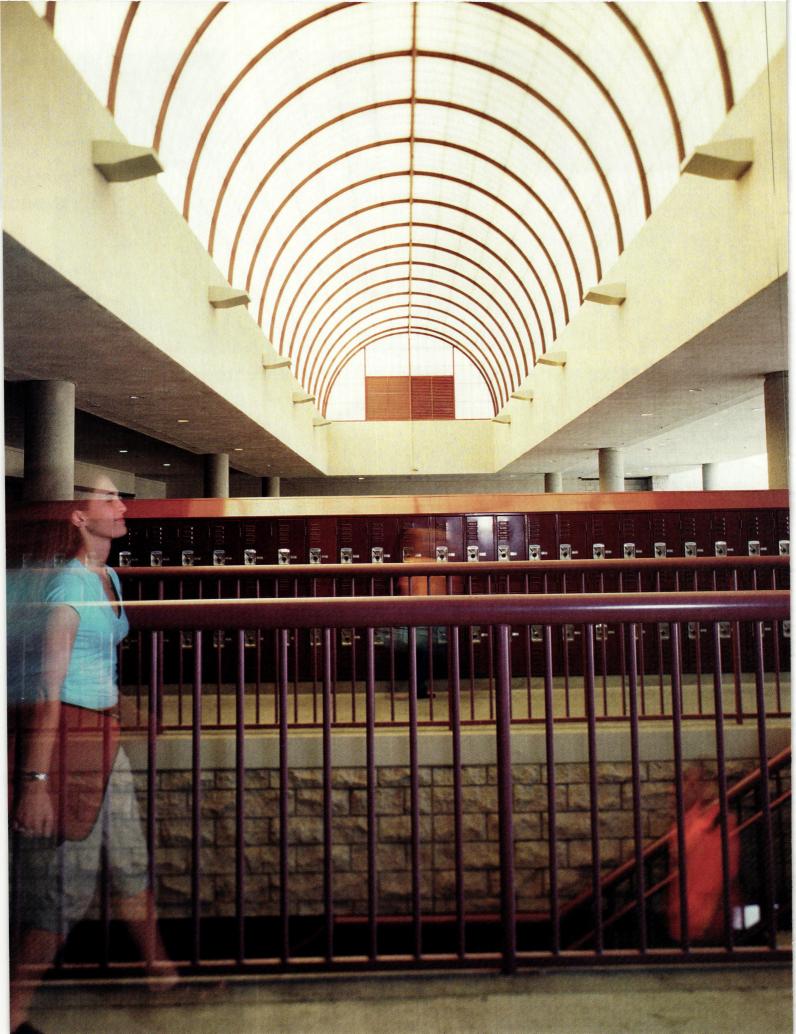
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Lesson Plans

Windowless, bunker-like schools are easy to build. But are they hard to learn in? A new generation of schools may shed some light on the question.

by Chuck Twardy | photography by Jenna Bodnar

TALK ENOUGH WITH PEOPLE WHO HAVE ATTENDED, TAUGHT IN or even visited Clark County schools over the years, and the impressions often are grim.

"I never had a window," Brandon Sprague, an architect who grew up here, recalls bleakly.

Architect Craig Galati, who chairs the Las Vegas Planning Commission, remembers his high school, Bonanza, as "a prison—a big, block box without any windows."

Teacher and Assemblywoman Chris Giunchigliani laments that the benefits of windows, natural light and lively design are well-known among educators, "and yet we have schools built more like a prison."

Words such as "barracks" or "crypt" sometimes supplant the correctional imagery, usually attended by adjectives such as "harsh" or "stark." These comments are not isolated, nor do they represent bitter hyperbole on the part of those who insist that the Clark County School District must design and build better schools. Almost everyone who rues a history of bland, windowless, repeated prototypes—including some architects working on current prototypes—acknowledges that the district faces a daunting task in keeping pace with Southern Nevada's prodigious growth.

The question is whether the district, three years into a 10-year, \$3.5 billion bond-supported building program, can or will escape its history. Pat Herron, the district's assistant superintendent for facilities, says the 1998 bond program ushered in a new era of school design for the county, introducing windows and natural light to its prototype schools. His philosophy for them is inarguable: "If you design a school with the needs of the customers—the kids—in mind, then you can make a difference."

And improvements appear to be on the way. The district is replacing one failing elementary school with a new building that promises to be a model for community interaction. It is studying the possibilities of energy efficiency through daylighting and other means. Its next generation of

CIMMARON-MEMORIAL HIGH LIGHTS UP ITS OPEN AREAS NICELY, BUT WINDOWS ARE NOTICEABLY ABSENT IN CLASSROOMS .

two-story prototypes, under design for inner-city lots—and smaller suburban ones—could be its most innovative yet.

But is that good enough? These are the buildings, after all, in which we will educate the county's children. Can we crank out a dozen or more schools a year on prototype patterns and expect them to be superior facilities? And will they be what schools historically have been—community centers, both impressive and welcoming?

The district says yes on all counts. That still leaves Las Vegas, however, with a less than admirable legacy. It seems as if the district has been playing catch-up ever since the Strip started to carry Las Vegas away from Downtown. All the while, it has erected and re-erected the same schools—all windowless to combat heat, crime and cost—and it's carefully minded the taxpayer's dime, in bond issues or pay-as-you-go programs. And now the county is stuck with the results.

EARLY ON A CLEAR AUGUST MORNING, ANOTHER WITHERING, triple-digit day impends. Jack L. Schofield Middle School, soon to open for the first time, presents a long masonry wall, occasionally pierced by glass block, to the intense morning sun. The 149,000-square-foot prototype school, one of four opening this fall designed by Welles Pugsley Architects, offers an open but mostly shaded court that connects pods of classrooms, each grouped around a commons in the "school within a school" format favored by educators.

Each pod has a state-of-the-art computer lab, and each classroom is wired for computers. The color palettes shift between pods, and classrooms have an accent wall painted a different pale hue. Some classrooms on the perimeter even have glass block strips admitting some daylight. A larger arrangement of glass block illumines the spacious library. Motion detectors turn lights on and off. Band, cafeteria and gymnasium facilities gleam with up-to-date equipment. "It's utilitarian, but also it's beautiful," Principal Roberta Holton concludes.

Meanwhile, in North Las Vegas, another prototype—an elementary

school resulting from a collaboration of Domingo Cambeiro Corporation and JMA Architecture Studio—readies for its grand opening. Kay Carl Elementary is one of five elementary schools opening this fall. Its classroom pods are grouped around a shaded courtyard, and clerestory windows in the classrooms opening onto its perimeter hallway pull in daylight. The airy, daylit library opens onto this courtyard, as well. Fiber-optic wiring extends to six computer outlets in each classroom. The physical education room subdivides. The art room has an artful arrangement of different shapes of glass-block openings so young artists can create in natural light. The colors are light and lively, playful throughout. The entrance canopy—as a finishing touch—is supported by Y-shaped columns that look like Tinker Toys.

Back in the southeastern Valley, another type of building prepares to open on Green Valley High School's campus. It, too, is a prototype. Its block walls echo the texture and banding of the high school's exterior, but inside it's all air and light and high-tech touches. Clerestories carry light deep into classrooms and computer labs. Beyond the entrance security desk, the wired platform floor of an "Interactive Learning Center" is surrounded by a railing of rebar; the columns are encased in the silvery spiral of drainage pipes. It's an audacious prototype, and it belongs to the Community College of Southern Nevada.

Critics have long argued that schools need to better integrate themselves into the community, and this is a prime example of the district doing just that. Similar CCSN High Tech Centers have been built on the Palo Verde and Western high school campuses. High school students use the facility during the day, and community college students take computer courses in the evening.

The high-tech flourishes in these centers are evidence of a design exuberance Clark County students rarely encounter in their schools. More important, the reliance on daylight is more extensive than in any of the current school prototypes. Such reliance should hardly be surprising. Visit Tate Snyder Kimsey Architects' self-designed offices in Henderson and you'll find a passive-solar marvel: Architects CAD-ing away in vast, open, entirely daylit space, with nary a light on anywhere. If its architects can do this, you might wonder, why cannot the school district?

"That's been discussed forever," says Kathy Harney, the district's school planning director in the mid-1980s. "It's nice to have windows. The question is maintenance and the cost of heating and cooling." Harney has little sympathy for the district's design critics. "When you're involved in the work on a day-to-day basis, you always have a different perspective than those on the outside," she says. "I think they're doing a heck of a job. I really find it hard to be critical."

No one can argue that sunlight in the desert can be brutal on buildings and their energy consumption. And security is an issue, too. But around the rest of the country, these imperatives have begun to share the stage

with daring designs that reflect recent research into how school buildings affect learning. Welcoming, visually varied spaces with ample sunlight and views to the outdoors are hallmarks of the new design trend, as studies show students in such environments achieve higher test scores than their counterparts in more basic buildings.

According to *The New York Times*, as much as \$500 billion in new-school construction is expected nationwide in the next decade, so the stakes are enormous. The average school around the country is 40 years old, and most teachers find its facilities lacking. When the marketing research firm Schapiro Research Group surveyed 1,050 public school teachers last year, 92 percent said classroom design was critical to student performance, while only 18 percent gave their classrooms an A for design. Specifically, teachers rated comfort, flexibility, color and control of heating and air conditioning highly significant.

And daylight turns out to be crucial to academic performance. The Heschong Mahone Group, a California-based building consulting firm, analyzed test scores for 21,000 students from three districts in three states and found a definitive correlation between achievement and daylighting. In the Capistrano School District of Orange County, California, they found that, in one year, students in classrooms with the most daylighting progressed 20 percent faster in math tests and 26 percent faster in reading tests than students with the least daylighting.

"Natural light is conducive to learning," stresses Galati, principal with Lucchesi Galati Architects. "I don't think taking it out is an option. The question is how to design it. There's got to be a way to do both."

SOME ARGUE THAT PROTOTYPES ARE THE SOURCE OF THE problem. C. Kenneth Tanner, professor at the University of Georgia College of Education and director of its School Design and Planning Laboratory, criticizes the nationwide preference of efficiency over excellence. "It depends on whether or not they want the kids to learn," he says. "If you want to house kids in little rooms for 12 years and then turn them loose, then that's OK." Prototypes imply a one-size-fits-all attitude, he contends, and they do not account for context or differences in neighborhoods.

"It seems to me the needs of the community would be so diverse that a prototype wouldn't serve all of them," Galati says.

Prototype designers disagree, of course. "People think of a prototype as something less than a great building," says Bill Snyder, principal with Tate Snyder Kimsey, which designs Clark County's high school prototypes. "I disagree vehemently. I think these designs stand alone." Snyder's firm is working on the next prototype, which draws on the indoor mall, a place teens know and love, as an inspiration. The first is likely to open in 2004.

Prototypes promise efficiency and savings to the district. "Our primary concern in building schools is to have seats on time for children," says Dale Scheideman, the district's facilities planning director. By build-

school DESIGN

ing prototypes, the district pays architects a onetime fee, based on a project's overall budget, then only has to pay them to adapt each school to its site. Construction costs are lower, too, because contractors are familiar with the models. "We're happy to take those schools and compare them with any other school in the nation, because we built quality schools, even though they may be prototypes," Scheideman says.

Sprague, a partner of Dekker Perich Holmes Sabatini, which has handled renovation and modernization projects for the district, says a prototype does not respond to its site, but rather obliterates it to suit the building. And if it turns out to be a bad design, you're stuck with it.

But Herron and Scheideman say prototypes are constantly under review and updated. "Almost continually we get and record feedback from the users," Herron says. Mostly the feedback is from principals, he says, with some from teachers and curriculum specialists in the central office. The prototypes are designed with a great deal of flexibility, to account for changes in instructional methods and technology. "I've got to develop schools that work over a long period of time," Herron says.

"The great thing about a prototype, when you find something isn't working, you can make those corrections and fine-tune it," says Wade Simpson of Welles Pugsley Architects, which designed the current middle school prototype and is at work on a two-story model. "If you start to understand how to re-site them, how to make them integral to the site, then you can do them in an appropriate way."

SCHOOLS USED TO BE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS, WHERE KIDS learned by day, and where neighbors played softball, rehearsed dramas and gathered to discuss issues. Concerns for security helped turn them into single-use buildings segregated from their neighborhoods, and Las Vegas' habit of building windowless bunkers made schools all the more isolated. That's starting to change, as some argue that the best way to secure the support of parents, and the community at large, is by returning to the community-center concept.

Clark County schools are taking steps in that direction. New prototypes are designed so theaters, gymnasiums and multipurpose rooms can be opened after hours while securing the rest of the building. The district allows municipal recreation programs to use athletic fields after hours. And welcoming community college buildings to high school campuses is a notable example of community integration. But the district's critics say that's only a beginning.

"What they're doing is great, but I think they could be taking it to another level," Galati says. "They're missing opportunities to be great schools, the center and heart of the community." He and others suggest that schools, especially in less-affluent areas, offer social services, a food bank or even a laundry. "Schools are a part of a community," Giunchigliani says, and prototypes should have the flexibility to meet community needs.

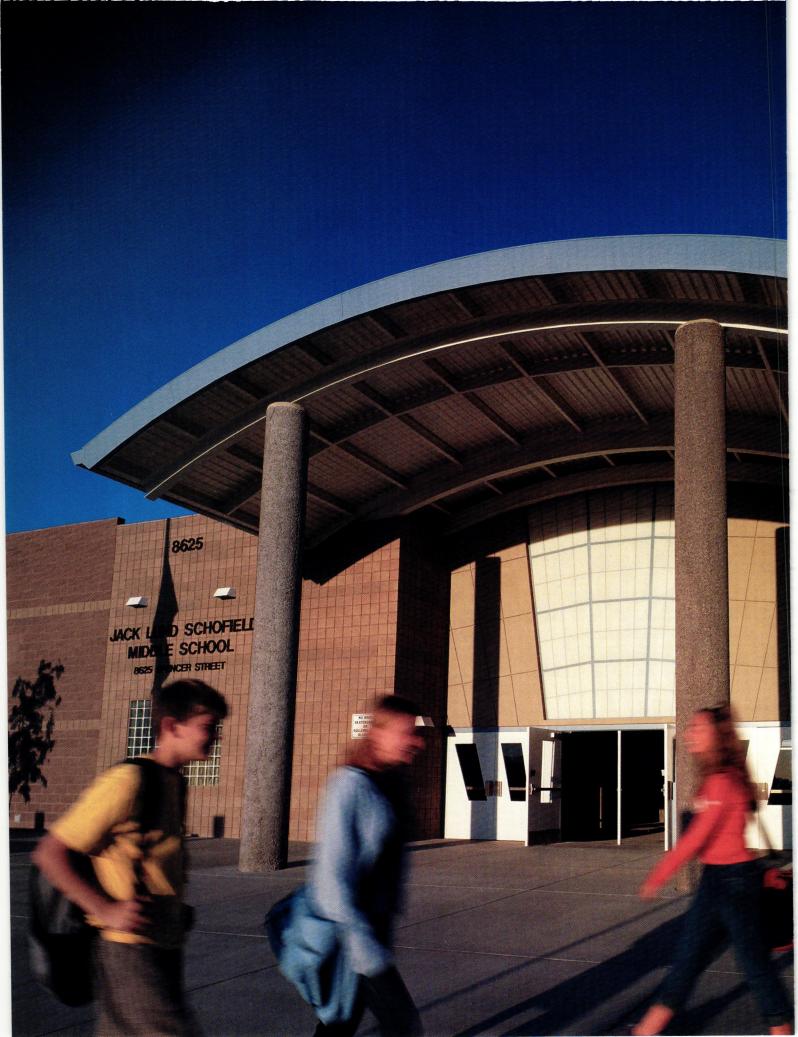








OLD-SCHOOL VEGAS: CANNON MIDDLE SCHOOL (TOP TWO) ILLUSTRATES MODULATION TO THE EXTREME, INSIDE AND OUT; BASIC AND ELDORADO HIGHS (BOTTOM TWO) REPRESENT TWO LOWS IN CLARK COUNTY SCHOOL DESIGN.



school DESIGN

Herron anticipates community integration in a pilot-project school being built this year. The new Wendell P. Williams Elementary School will open next fall, replacing Madison Elementary near Downtown. Perez-Green Architects, working with Tate Snyder Kimsey, has designed the new school, which resulted from an intensive study process led by Herron. To improve poor student-performance levels at Madison, the school will have a variety of new spaces, including rooms for tutoring and multimedia studies, separate cafeteria and multipurpose rooms (so the latter can be used more), a child-care center, and rooms for community and family interaction. "You can't really educate a child just by focusing on the child," Herron says. "You have to work with the whole family."

This is not the only innovative plan in the works. Architect Robert Fielden of RAFI is conducting an assessment study of Chapparal High School, to determine if it is feasible to renovate it "for use for the next 40 years." Among the possibilities he imagines are flexible interior spaces for a variety of different curriculum uses, energy and resource conservation and sustainability. He foresees a second "skin" around the building to reduce thermal load, perhaps a novel chiller system. And indirect natural light.

Prototype designs tend to stay within a narrow stable of architects, and in this local architects have their sharpest dispute with the school district. "Every time there's an opportunity to get new work with them, we can't seem to break that barrier, to have a dialogue," Sprague says. "It just seems weird. There are a lot of architects and just a few doing [the prototypes]."

Two separate committees of school district personnel select architects for prototypes: one to narrow the field and the second to interview candidates. The firms that have had the experience tend to get the work. "It's not like there isn't an opportunity for all," Scheideman says. "Some do a better job and they obviously get selected more often."

This is the Catch-22 architects face every day: You can't get the work if you can't get the experience. Carpenter believes his firm is proving to the district, through its remodeling and work on additions, that it deserves a shot at designing a school. Carpenter Sellers' stick-figure entrance feature for an elementary-school addition was the genesis of the entrance used in the current prototype. The district can only benefit from welcoming "fresh ideas," Carpenter says. Galati adds that "new blood" might involve teachers and the community more in the planning and design processes.

Scheideman says the district can't risk turning over a major project to an unproven firm—"We don't have the time," he says—but Galati argues that new thinking doesn't preclude efficiency. The district, he says, must "quit using the word 'or.' They have to start using the word 'and.' There's no option: Create space conducive to learning. It's not that you discard one for the other."

Chuck Twardy, a local free-lance writer, is a former architecture critic for The Orlando Sentinel and the News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina.









NEW-SCHOOL VEGAS: WENDELL P. WILLIAMS ELEMENTARY WILL REPLACE MADISON NEXT FALL, REFLECTING LESSONS LEARNED FROM A RECENT SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDY. NOTE THE TWO-STORY CLASSROOM WING. AND, YES, PEREZ-GREEN ARCHITECTS DO WINDOWS.





Neon Archipelago

Can Public Architecture
Unite the Islands of Las Vegas?

A decade ago, the Tropicana made a splash across the country with an ad campaign welcoming all to the "Island of Las Vegas." It was a reference not to the city as a unified land mass, but to the resort itself as an island within the city. Taken this way, it was an apt description of the way the Valley floor is organized. There are islands of tourism, islands of retail, and islands upon islands of enclosed tract home communities. One island adjoins the next only by paved canal—and we are solitary sailors, rarely hailing fellow travelers with more than one finger. How, then, are we to unite the archipelago, and what role can design play? If we are willing to fund the creation of new libraries, parks, schools and streetscapes, will great public architecture help reduce our isolation? Will the city become a community? Will Las Vegas be transformed from a place of potential to one of greatness? Join six prominent locals from the worlds of architecture, education and culture as they ponder the ties that bind.

DAVID FROMMER: We're here to discuss public architecture and whatever that means. I guess it's up to us to forward our thoughts on what that is and how that is different and unique to Las Vegas. Maybe the best way to open this discussion is to go around and everyone can put forth what they perceive or believe public architecture to be and how the public interacts with it.

ROBIN GREENSPUN: Why don't we start with an architect?

ERIC STRAIN: I envision public architecture, at least within this Valley, as space that engages and activates public life, public activity. Not necessarily publicly funded,

but spaces where one is allowed to stand on a soapbox if they want, or have a picnic lunch, or a lobby space that allows a group to gather.

CRAIG GALATI: Public architecture is a great opportunity for us to represent our collective soul as a community. And that's what public architecture should be—a reflection of where we are at any given time in society, who we are as a people and what binds us together.

ROBERT TRACY: I see this time as a very unique period in Las Vegas history. ... We're at the millennial edge still, and what I see taking place is a series of patterns that seems

PHOTOGRAPHY BY J. MICHAEL BEALS

thinktank



Craig Galati The native Las Vegan is a principal with Lucchesi Galati Architects and serves as chairman of the Las Vegas Planning Commission.



David Frommer

The Roundtable's moderator is president of AIA Las Vegas and winner of two AIA Nevada Distinguished Service Awards this year (see Page 14).



Eric Strain

The owner of the firm ericStrain Architect is a past AIA Las Vegas president and was the winner of four AIA Nevada Design Awards last year.



Richard Moore

The founding president of Nevada State College was previously president of the Community College of Southern Nevada.



Robin Greenspun

The longtime arts advocate is a recipient of the Governor's Millennium Award for Distinguished Service, a board member of the Neon Museum and past chair of the Nevada Arts Council.



Robert Tracy

The associate dean of the College of Fine Arts at UNLV recently took the reins of the School of Architecture as its interim director.

to be almost like sets of waves and tides and they're coming together in a confluence, everything is crashing together, and I think it's an incredible opportunity. When Eric talks about public architecture that engages, I think we need to move in to empower the public. Design needs to step up and meet this new energy in a very, very powerful way, work with the general public and empower the public, not necessarily antagonize or provoke the public, but certainly engage them in much more of a powerful dialogue.

GREENSPUN: At one point we will probably argue that our hotels may not fit into what you're talking about as public spaces for the local citizen, but I agree with Bob, and what's happening right now with museums moving into hotels, all of a sudden you've got a combination of architecture going on, from what we would normally consider true architecture, more classic architecture with a museum design, now having to fit into a hotel space. I think this is an amazing time for this city.

RICHARD MOORE: Well, let me take a narrow perspective. I'll define it as a place where the public is allowed to come into buildings. I would take libraries, public libraries, as a strong example of where Las Vegas has done it brilliantly. I think it's some of the richest architecture in our town, and, functionally, somebody had the bravery to combine something with books each time. Theaters with books, an art gallery with books, meeting hall space-they step beyond the normal definition. I would say we, in many ways, lead the nation in public libraries. I would say in public schools we have the most mixed reviews I can think of. I think my children attend the most atrocious elementary school by designa building with no windows. It's an atrocity to have a building designed with no windows. And then I see other new buildings that are coming along now that are public schools and are rather interesting, but I looked at some of the buildings as I drove across town to come to this meeting that I would never want my child to attend because it's ugly or there are no windows in it.

STRAIN: I think we need to take public architecture and provoke it a little, and schools are a main area we can do that. We've been too lackadaisical the last several years—it's all about growth and let's get the building up and get it done. We haven't taken the time to really examine what it means to do that kind of work. Dr. Moore spoke about the library; how do you mix functions together? That's what public architecture should be about.

FROMMER: How successful is Las Vegas or Southern Nevada in creating and then sustaining public architecture?

MOORE: Let me step in and give Robin some credit. I would call the best building in town the county building. It has its own clear statement. It has a force all by itself, and Robin played a role [as a juror] in getting that architecture and that style picked. So I would start by saying there are some really dramatic things done. If I could find five county buildings in town I would say we'd match Phoenix, but we're not there.

GALATI: The county building was one of the first major public buildings that tried to be of its own place, and its elegance is in its simplicity in the fact that it was trying to be of Las Vegas and of the Valley instead of some type of transplanted notion that really has no contextual relationships here. The hotels, if they would pay any attention to the environment we're in, I think they would be much more successful.

GREENSPUN: Well, maybe architecturally. [Laughs.] But unfortunately it's not the animal that we're all about with the hotels. Having been in on the library bond issue that created the first libraries and the nightmares we went through with trying to get that going with the designs that were first put forth, I mean, it was pretty radical for its time. And it was a long time between that first bond issue and the county building happening. It's interesting that there

roundTABLE

hasn't been a real surge forward with other people taking that kind of chance up until that county building. And now the county seems to be headed more in that direction, yet a lot of the architecture that's following is just so similar that I think it takes away a little bit from what that county building was all about. I hate to see just cookie-cutter buildings going up around it. It's time for someone else in the public eye to take a chance on some new architecture.

GALATI: But I think you look at library district and [former director Charles] Hunsberger losing his job over taking a chance.

GREENSPUN: Absolutely.

GALATI: And so you see public agencies now that look to the libraries as a wonderful thing he did, but I'm not gonna put my neck on the line because I'm not gonna lose my job. And so the architects aren't challenging the governmental agencies to push it, the government agencies aren't doing it, so somebody has to step up, and I think Dr. Moore has done that and needs to continue to do that kind of work.

GREENSPUN: We have a man sitting right here who is someone willing to take the chance, to stick his neck out, not only for the project itself, but for the architecture of the project. And it does remind me very much of what we went through with the libraries and with Charles Hunsberger, who was just not going to let anybody say, "No, you can't do that." I mean he really did go out on a limb. He had a vision. That's what it's going to take, more people like this who are willing to take a chance and get blasted publicly in the process.

MOORE: Let me give one example of where we could do it. We're going to spend several billion dollars building high schools and elementary schools over the next 10 years. We've got the bonding authority. We really could have a stand-alone unit that figured out great architecture and get the building built on time independent of the superintendent. Brian Cram used to talk about how he ran three businesses: the

school district, a bus business and a schoolbuilding business. We really could have a standalone unit that would change this city by the schools we build.

STRAIN: My child is in third grade this year. She came home the first day of school, and she loves school, but she's ecstatic because she has a 12-by-12 window that's finally in her classroom. And she's just overjoyed that she can finally see the sky from a classroom after four years.

FROMMER: We have several ideas in school design or school environment that almost universally everyone agrees upon when they hear it—schools should have windows, schools should be central places of community. So how come we're getting prototypes? How come the vision everyone seems to like isn't yet resulting in a reality that reflects that vision?

TRACY: When Dr. Moore talks about driving across the city and seeing schools that are ugly, he raises an interesting word. We're going to find that beauty is going to be reintroduced. We're going to find, like the county building, people are going to look at that structure and say we can have beauty in our public buildings. And it's going to come from the public.

MOORE: Another side of that coin is, as we grow it's incumbent that we rebuild the innercity schools. I don't think that only good schools ought to be on the perimeter of the property or the town, and I don't think it's that expensive. I've looked at some of the remodeling game they've played, and they've spent millions and millions of dollars to change ceiling heights and take out asbestos. Spend two more million. Put portables in for two years, tear down the building, give the inner-city schools new buildings. I think you could change the life of the city in many ways by just picking 20 schools and saying we're going to redo them ... but make them provocative and fun.

TRACY: But the most interesting schools we have are those inner-city schools. They're tearing those down and putting up what the suburbs

have. So you're taking the most interesting schools we have and getting rid of them.

GALATI: I don't think we would build schools that didn't have windows and build schools that are ugly if we went and worked with the teachers and worked with the kids that went to school and found out-I mean, it's been a long time since we've been in school—how the kids use the school. Let's find out how teachers teach and spend that time designing specifically for that neighborhood, that community. There's a whole bunch of other services, especially in the innercity schools, that are needed. Why not have Laundromat areas where the mom can bring the kids to school, do her laundry, pick the kids up, take them home? Why not have cross-cultural kinds of things that work in the schools and take them back to the way that we remember schools. You know, going there on Saturday night to watch a movie, those kinds of things.

TRACY: Look at LA right now. Every single school they're building is an individual statement about that community, about that place, and they're doing it at the same speed we're doing it and at the same cost we're doing it. So if they can do it in LA, why the hell can't we do it here? And it's not just the Clark County School District that's got to step up, it's the architects in this town who have to put their foot down and say, "I'm not going to design another school building that looks like 12 others I've already done." But, on the flip side, there's a lot of money going through those schools, and they say it's a lot cheaper to do a prototype design versus specific design, but I think we have to get past the fact that we're just doing it to do it. There's got to be some quality of investment.

GALATI: We're never going to upgrade the product if we don't change the process. The process is the key to these schools, and we don't have a process.

GREENSPUN: I'm sure if you sit down with someone from the school district, anybody from the school district, they're going to say we have

problems so far above what the school looks like that it's so low on the list. What do you do about that?

STRAIN: The research shows our tests scores in this Valley are falling every year, and these are kids who have been raised in windowless environments. There's research out there that shows that if you give a child an opportunity to look out a window and daydream, when they refocus on the instructor, their retention is better and their grades go up. It's proven time and time again. How long are we going to let our children suffer with their education process before we start thinking the environment they learn in really does affect what they get?

MOORE: I think it's just a matter of getting people angry and saying to a school board, "You listen to these six people and start changing your ways."

TRACY: There are studies that show how important design and aesthetic issues are to the development of young children. And from music to art to dance, it's all part of a growing experience. We have to address it at the elementary level, we have to address it at the high school level and we certainly have to address it at the college level.

GREENSPUN: At least on the college level, because you have private donors for buildings, there's a little bit more control, a little bit more leeway, as far as design. Now whether or not it's being used is another story, because you're still back to red tape and you're still back to a board that's going to make decisions on that. But I would think that at least it gives you the opportunity.

GALATI: A lot of that comes back down to the client. We do quite a bit of work for the county, and the county is good in the fact that they hire professionals and they listen to you and allow you to show them ideas and show them things. It'd be nice if more design people would get involved on these boards and these commissions and these councils that really do have final approval. There's a lot of really good ideas that

get squelched because people don't understand what they are.

GREENSPUN: That's one of the things the county does well is put together boards and panels and groups-you know, citizens groups that come in for their architectural designs. And they do try and get some of the big questions answered, but it just seems to me, from being involved again as a citizen, this is one of the biggest problems we have, and I'm sure this is going to be the answer the school district will give and other government groups will givethat they don't want to offend anybody. They don't want anybody mad at them for the building. They've got enough problems. Well, then you end up with vanilla. You have to take a chance. Charles took a chance with the libraries. He got blasted for it just constantly. In the end, everybody loves them.

STRAIN: Charles' victory, though, was when the county commissioner who was running [Don Schlesinger] stood in front of the West Charleston Library and said, "If I'm re-elected, no more of these Taj Mahals will be built." It was the cheapest library that was built during that issue, and the guy got defeated. And Charles had to feel very good about that. Here was a politician trying to give us the vanilla boxes and the public said no. We need more people to stand up and say no.

FROMMER: We live in a city that, in some ways, has a great appreciation for taking risks. So why are we so afraid to take risks in what we do in creating our built environment, in creating these public spaces? It seems like, in many cases, the risks are taken in a valiant way and ultimately fizzle out after a period of excitement. Why is that?

GREENSPUN: It's the same thing over and over. It's not that we're ashamed of the Strip and hotels, but people have laughed at us about it: "How can you live in Las Vegas? Look at what your town is all about." And we're so protective that we go totally the other way of trying to be

so conservative about what we do in the community itself, outside the Strip, because we don't want anybody to say we're not like them. We want to be middle America. We want to be like everybody else.

TRACY: With those extremes we have two perceptions that, as a community, we really have to work on. One is that good design is more expensive. I don't think that's the case. You can make a really good, solid study and find that really good design is cost-effective. The other is, and Robin touched on it, the idea of we don't want to offend people. How people see something is based largely on what they bring to it, their background, their culture, how they were raised, their own perceptions and preconceptions, their biases, prejudices. As designers, you don't really have much you can do about that. I think the professional community needs to get beyond that idea of being afraid to offend and really go after good design.

STRAIN: When the Museum of Contemporary Art first opened [in Los Angeles], all the press that came out was very positive; everybody was ecstatic. And they interviewed Arata Isozaki the night of the opening and said this has got to be wonderful that everybody thinks this is the best building you've ever done, and he turned to them and said, "It's my biggest failure, because I didn't get anybody else that didn't like the building. If I do a project out there and there's only one reaction to it, I've failed as a designer. If I don't do a project that has multiple reactions to it, then I haven't done what I was hired to do." And that's what we need to get to. It's up to us to provoke the community, and I don't think we're doing a very good job of that.

GALATI: We're supposed to stimulate dialogue. I mean, that's part of what we do is create that. I grew up in Las Vegas as well, and you're right, we've always been afraid of who we are. I think we need to celebrate who we are.

FROMMER: Looking at Las Vegas and this whole desire to show the world that we're normal

people like everyone else—you know, we go to church, we go to school, we shop at the grocery store—have we lost our edge? Has there been such a push for what I've termed consistent mediocrity that we're becoming bland now that we're no longer what Las Vegas aspired to be 20, 30 years ago?

GREENSPUN: It's not just us. It's happening all over the country. Wherever we go, there are the same stores and the same malls, the same this, the same that. It doesn't matter where you are anymore—other than the weather. Cities are losing their identities. We always reinvent ourselves; why can't we be the ones who say, "Enough of this; let's do something else"? And not just on the Strip; let's start doing that in our communities.

TRACY: If designers see themselves as scouts and go out, explore and come back with ideas, then we won't lose the edge. The solution, in many ways, is with the designers.

GREENSPUN: But designers can't be the only ones; they have to have the clients who are willing to put the money up to build these buildings and redesign these neighborhoods. That's the tough part. We have no lack of talented designers in this town, but ...

TRACY: So you have to engage and empower.

GREENSPUN: Yeah, but most of them don't have the opportunity to show how innovative and talented they are because there just aren't enough projects where people are willing to take a chance, whether it's public or private.

GALATI: We've always had a lot of clients who say, "Well, the public's going to be in an uproar over this." Whenever we have done public projects and engaged the public in the process, the opposite has been true. The public comes there expecting to see design and knowing that good design will bring meaning to their lives and their community. We're working in North Las Vegas on a library that we did on a *charrette* [a public discussion group] and we're doing one at Anthem.

They're going to help push that standard, and you get enough of those people involved and engaged in that process that, when you go make a presentation, they've heard and they become advocates.

GREENSPUN: The community takes ownership of it, and that's what it's all about, to give the ownership back to the users.

FROMMER: So what do we build in the future? How do we stem this tide, this homogenous or non-risk-taking attitude, when we know it's the risks that are going to make successful public spaces? When are we going to essentially create the Las Vegas everyone around the world points to and says, "Look at this place, it's amazing"? We certainly do that in the Strip architecture, which I'm sure we can define as public architecture in its own right.

GREENSPUN: It's our best example of public architecture.

FROMMER: It really is. How can we bring that kind of adventuresome and risk-taking spirit to the rest of Las Vegas?

GALATI: The Strip is market-driven, and we do need to get our public architecture to think more like a business. What is my customer, my client? Who do they need and what will bring them back and bring them back to get better service?

STRAIN: I think we've had it too easy. As designers, we haven't been challenged. One of the things this community really needs, and I think we're up to that size now, is an architecture critic on one of the major newspapers. And that's the voice that then starts the challenge, starts critiquing the projects that are going on. That's the role of this magazine, to start that dialogue. But what we really need in this town is an architectural critic.

GALATI: Have you ever been to a zoning board meeting in another town and listened to the heightened dialogue about the actual project, versus the "not in my back yard" talk that happens at our zoning meetings? It's because that public has been educated through things like

that, and they have an appreciation. You go to a zoning board in San Francisco, it's a whole different thing. It's phenomenal.

TRACY: They'll argue with you word for word on the design, not just red tile.

GREENSPUN: We may never get to that point in this town because the population is different than those cities. And we have to deal with that. It's not that there aren't people here who are concerned, and it's not that people here aren't educated. Part of the problem is this city being so transient. A lot of people come here and they're done with being involved with designing their communities. They've done it already; they've done it where they grew up; they've done it in their hometowns. And they don't want to take the time and the energy to do it again here. And we suffer for that.

TRACY: Or, the other half of the population doesn't think they're going to be here in three years.

GREENSPUN: There's no buy-in, no ownership because of that. We have a lot of people who are here and don't know for how long, so they're not going to invest their time.

TRACY: And 18 years later, you're still sitting at a table talking about this when you didn't think you were going to be here in three years. [Laughter.] That's why, when we design things, we're not interested in designing for the future, because the people you're working with, they're not looking any further than a couple of years out there to begin with.

GALATI: We talk a lot about design, but certainly economics plays into this, public policy plays into this. You look at Las Vegas, which is in many ways the ultimate 24-hour city. You know the Strip has done an incredible job of making this kind of dense, vibrant urban environment that's constantly going somewhere, moving somewhere, constantly exciting. Well, you know New York's done that on Broadway, San Francisco's done that at Union Square in the kind of the environments that meld local citizens with those tourists who come in to take

part in that city's experience. We haven't gotten to that point yet as I see it; we're still kind of distinct in that way. What if the Strip incorporated—and this is kind of far-fetched, but I'll say it anyway—what if the Strip incorporated a strong residential population? You know what kind of an experience that would create?

GREENSPUN: That's not so far-fetched because you have a whole crop of high-rise apartment buildings going up on the Strip, and that is going to start changing what the area around the Strip is all about because those people need to go to grocery stores, and those grocery stores are going to start coming closer and closer. What's going to happen to those streets right off of Las Vegas Boulevard? It could change dramatically.

STRAIN: Maybe we need to bring more of the Strip to the environments outside the Strip. Kind of that entrepreneurial spirit of that environment, that place. Dr. Moore did that when he was at the community college. He was asked to design new campuses for the community college for billions of dollars, but instead of doing that, the high-tech centers were created, and here was a new attitude, a new direction that came in dealing with a lack of public funds that we're all facing and accomplishing the same thing. He got all of his campuses around the community by tying these high-tech centers in to the high schools. It's not what people thought they were going to get, but just by putting it out there and being successful with it, people now want a high-tech center in all of their high schools. It takes that willingness to try something and be willing to fail.

TRACY: For instance, we're short on libraries, we're short on schools. The library district can't get a bond passed. Why can't the two come together? They're both about a community, they're both about a neighborhood. The schools are building libraries within elementary, middle and high schools. Why can't the library district work hand in hand with the school district and create a community school—not just a school

and a library down the street, but a real sense of community?

GREENSPUN: Well, Dr. Moore is working on doing that right now in Henderson.

MOORE: We're actually not going to build a public library at Nevada State College. It's a chance to build a public library and a state college library, but actually I don't want to run the library, I want Joan Kerschner, the head of the Henderson public library, to run my library. I'm trying to get the Internet and Barnes & Noble to run my bookstore. I'm trying to get somebody else to run a golf course on my property. Question is, how many partners can you take with you, and that's what we're able to do on high-tech centers. Brian Cram was able to say to me that the best thing at the community college are these computer labs; give me that lab at my high school and I'll invite you in.

TRACY: That's the direction, I think. It's consortia, it's building partnerships. It's finding where a lot of the overlaps may be. It may not be something you would think of naturally, but there are overlaps out there. The Guggenheim is a perfect example. Their collection has been increased incredibly because they've partnered with several museums in Europe, plus the Hermitage in Russia, so they have access to all this archive that they can now tour. They couldn't do that before, now they can. We need to think in terms of partnering and consortia.

GALATI: If you compare the restaurants to maybe what's happening in architecture, restaurants kind of all became the same, the same food everywhere you went. And then all of a sudden a few of them started popping out, "I'm going to be different, I'm going to be special." Maybe we're at that point in architecture where we've been through this homogenization of architecture and now it's time for somebody to step up, like the Guggenheim, and then you'll see the next and then the next. And in five years I think this discussion will be pretty interesting to have.

GREENSPUN: Well, one of the nice things that is happening is that some of these restaurants that are so successful in hotels on the Strip are now starting to think about going out into the community. I mean they may not be moving too far yet, they're being careful, but they are starting to talk about building free-standing restaurants as structures to try what they're known for in other communities, and it'll be very interesting to see how that works. They are finally talking about coming into the communities. And the way they've transformed the Strip with restaurants, that may be the key, it may be the catalyst that we need.

STRAIN: Look at what happened in Green Valley at Town Center. Before that was proposed, the thought of people actually dining outside in Las Vegas in 110-degree heat, no restaurant would buy that. And it was proposed to them several times before they actually went forward with it. And I think you'll see restaurants on the Strip moving out into the suburbs. So the public spaces that go with these amenities, I think you'll see an improvement in. And you'll see people start to find out what this place is about and realize that if design is done right, you can be outside when it's 110 and be comfortable. It's not deadly. You can experience that through design and make a public space an enjoyable place to be, and that's part of what could fall out of the

GALATI: One of the things that I wish the Strip would do is make the connections more public, because those spaces are actually more important than the buildings themselves—the edges, the connections, the vantages and what you do moving between things. That's where the experience lies, because once you're inside you're usually there for a reason. Sure you could be inspired and sure you should be, but that contemplative walk from the parking lot to the building is where a lot of the experience is, and it's lost.

roundTABLE

STRAIN: Yeah, Wynn's towers aren't great architecture, but that street-level experience is great and that's what he really brought to us. The Y tower had been done before and he really hasn't improved on that any, but it's the public street that he has to be credited for really changing.

TRACY: That's probably an area of design that the public sector needs to move into—the approaches, those links between districts, the sight lines. I think the public sector could really make a strong contribution there, learning from the laboratory of the Strip.

STRAIN: They're putting a little attempt on Lewis Street to try to make a connection between those things. Even that small gesture is going to make people realize that when somebody designs a project we have to look outside the four property lines that we're given and ask how these things start making connections to other facilities. Universities have to accept that, schools have to accept that, fire stations have to accept it. We need to build a community, not just individual buildings.

GALATI: It's not just accept it; it's a responsibility. That's what we're asked to do.

FROMMER: We're coming to a close here, so I'm going to pose one last question: What is the next important public space we're going to see in Las Vegas, or we should see in Las Vegas?

MOORE: I'm going to try to make the state college that. But I'll take the advocacy position that the Rand Corporation argued, that there needs to be, like, five state colleges in this valley in the next 10 years. If we don't pull off some private colleges, we need a college in Downtown Las Vegas. I mean, we'll just start going around town dropping in colleges, each with their own special orientation. Oscar Goodman wants an art college. If we build five state colleges in the next 10 years, you'll change the town, particularly if each one's different, run by a different maverick. Think of Art Center College of Design—drop one of those in downtown Las Vegas. Think of Cal

Poly-San Luis Obispo—drop it out in North Las Vegas. Think of UC-San Diego—drop it out in Summerlin. You could change the town with five or six colleges.

TRACY: I think the next important public architecture space, at least in theory, is going to be what we do with that shadow from the Guggenheim, because I've seen so many of the patterns of this new millennial epic sort of consolidated in what the Guggenheim is doing-willing to pay for good design to bring in a top architect, which is their heritage. You know the Guggenheim because of Frank Lloyd Wright, you know the Guggenheim because of Frank Gehry, you'll know the Guggenheim here because of Koolhaas. So they're willing to pay for design, and I think design is an important solution to many of the problems we're facing. We also have to think in terms like Dr. Moore was saying, extending out, creating partnerships, creating consortia. Most publicly funded institutions by themselves are not going to be able to do it. They have to be able to find other sources that are stable that they can count on. And I think that's where the opportunities for Las Vegas are going to be.

GREENSPUN: Well, from what I'm hearing, what should be the next public space that will make an impact would be Downtown on the Union Pacific property. But I think the state college is going to have an impact, and they'll still be arguing about what's going at the Union Pacific space, so I happen to agree that the state college is going to be it. And I think it's right that it should be.

STRAIN: I'm going to steal Craig's thunder, because I think more important than the state college is what the water district is doing with the Springs Preserve, because they really force the designers to think about this place more than anybody in this town's ever done before. And you're looking at projects that aren't going to have air conditioning, that are dealing with the environment in a positive light, not just closing it off and dumping more tons of A/C

into it. You're not looking at the facility, but the context that it's in and the environment that it's in. And I think that's going to have more impact than the colleges, to be honest with you. I think the college is very important, don't get me wrong, but for the general public, the public spaces and the ideas for the preserve, if they're successful in carrying that out and if they stick to their guns and do it and don't chicken out, that's probably going to be the most important public space for design in this community. I think the other thing is that Dr. Moore has shown that a competition can be successful. That's an avenue that can start to change architecture in this town, if we see a willingness to approach competitions. We select our designers based on, "Can you meet the schedule and can you meet the budget? I don't care what it looks like. Can you do those two things?" [But] it's not all about meeting a schedule and meeting a budget. If we get the community to buy into those things, get the designers to buy into that, design doesn't have to be more expensive. It just has to be well thought out, and then the community will buy into it. And I think those are the things that'll change this community.

GALATI: Well, I was saving my Las Vegas Springs talk for last as well [laughs], since we're so active in that. But you know there is a public agency that's taking a huge risk. It is a risk, but it's a risk that they can't afford not to take and they recognize that and what that project will do. If it does what I believe it will, it will change behavior, and that's what will change the face of this town—changing people's behavior, changing people's attitudes about what it is. That project won't be judged by what it is today; it will be judged by what it does tomorrow. And that's what all of our public architecture should be.

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OUR DUTCH TREAT

Koolhaas on the Strip is a more logical match than you (or he) would think

BY HANS IBELINGS



WHEN THE DUTCH ARCHITECT REM KOOLHAAS WAS AWARDED the 2000 Pritzker Prize—regularly, and without irony, referred to as the Nobel Prize for architecture—his response was that it was the first time the jury had chosen a controversial architect. Quite apart from the possibility of seeing the award as a sign that Koolhaus is not nearly as controversial as he would like to think, the remark says something about his uneasy relation with what for simplicity's sake we may call the established order, to which he himself irrevocably belongs.

A glance at his work (while under construction) proves the point. In addition to the master plan for the center of Almere, the Netherlands' fastest-growing new polder town, the Netherlands Embassy in Berlin, a concert hall in Porto, Portugal, the Illinois Institute of Technology's main building in Chicago, and the public library in Seattle, Koolhaas is currently working for Universal, Prada and, as editorial adviser, for the Condé Nast publishing house. The two exhibition spaces in the Venetian, for the Guggenheim and the Hermitage-Guggenheim, are therefore no exceptions, but rather a logical component of the assignment portfolio of Koolhaas' Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA).

What all these commissions indicate, is that regardless of how con-

troversial some of his projects may be or seem, a great many public and private "established orders" are only too keen to engage Koolhaas as designer. Within his own professional circle, too, he enjoys a status that is surpassed by few, perhaps even by none. His every design and every spoken or written utterance is

ONLY TIME WILL TELL HOW KOOLHAAS' GUGGENHEIM WILL HOLD UP IN VEGAS.

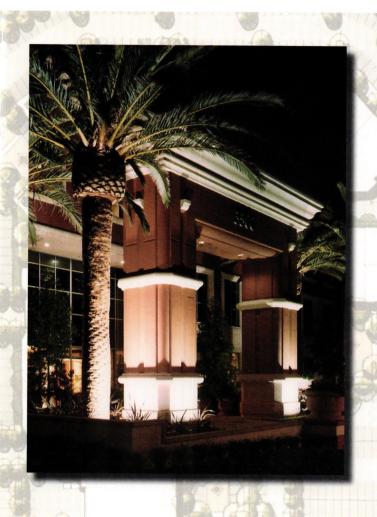
closely monitored by colleagues, students and critics.

In such a position of universal adulation and minimal contradiction, this clinging to the image of contentiousness has an element of tragedy. For Koolhaas now finds himself in a situation where his contentiousness is wholly assimilated; indeed, people expect him to be contrary and to thumb his nose at convention. It is the penalty of fame that no matter how perverse and provocative he may be, the effect is destined to be muted.

Time alone will show how Koolhaas' work in Las Vegas will fare, but in a city visited yearly by millions of people primed to encounter the ultimate in entertainment, to see the most ingenious and stunning attractions at every turn, it is unlikely that many will be bowled over by OMA's front and back annexes at the Venetian.

Koolhaas is the first Pritzker Prize winner to build in Las Vegas. That, too, can be seen as proof that he is part of the establishment. For if there is any place on Earth that has no time for the second-rate, it is Las Vegas Boulevard. For all who wish architecture well, it is to be hoped that Koolhaas' twofold foray into this competitive environment will be the beginning of a trend. And that after the top entertainers and the top chefs, it will be the turn of the architectural elite to be hired on a large scale. Should that ever come to pass, the list of Pritzker Prize winners, ranging from Philip Johnson to Herzog & de Meuron, would be no bad starting point.

Hans Ibelings is an Amsterdam-based architecture critic. This article was translated by Robyn de Jong-Dalziel.





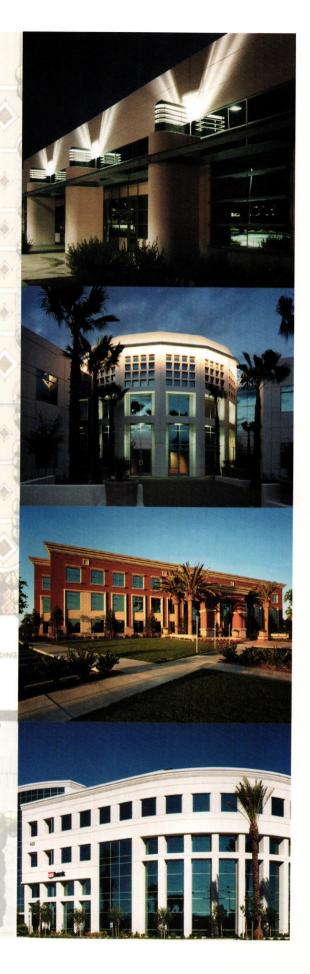
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